Ninety-Third Year. ST. LOUIS, MO., SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21, 1900. Price, Five Cents.

THE ST. LOUIS REPUBLIC. MAGAZINE SECTION.

The Wonderful Story of a Middle-aged St. Louis Woman who Continues a Babe Through a Long Life.

"AND PLAYED WILD GAMES WITH THE PUPPIES AND KITTENS."

ONE DAY THE KITTENS AND PUPPIES MISSED THEIR PLAYMATE.

CLAY JETER.

WHERE CLAY JETER LIVES.

SO LONG AS SHE HAS HER DOLL AND OTHER CHILDREN TO PLAY WITH . . . THERE IS NOTHING ELSE TO DESIRE

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC

UT IN WELLSton, a little old gray-haired child plays with dolls through all the weary days—plays with dolls, and dresses them, and scolds them, and puts them to bed, and makes queer little dresses for them to wear, and queer little quilts for them to sleep under.

Her name is Clay Jeter. She has been doing this for fifty-two years—and she is now 58. Once her hair was golden, and her face was chubby. Then she trotted about the house and yard and fields, and played wild games with the kittens and the puppies that were members of the big family in that country home on the site of what is now Goode avenue and Whittier street. She ran and romped, and took her puppies and her kittens and her doll on long, long tramps—out through the big rustling trees, and across soft waving patches of grass, to the side of a spring which was the great journey of a furlong from her home. And there, with dolly in her arms, and with the kittens and the puppies curled at her feet and at her head, she would fall asleep in the cool shade and dream of fairies until one of her companions would call to her in the universal language of babyhood that it was time for them to go home.

One day the kittens and the puppies missed their playmate. Poor dolly was left to stare alone from the corner in which she had been "put to bed" the night before. The little girl with the golden hair and the chubby face was ill. The roses in her cheeks were doubly red, and the heat of fever burned her pretty blue eyes until they ached and stung. The doctor came, and took the fat brown hand in his own, and shook his head.

And for many, many days he came—and went—and came again; and the mother of the poor little sufferer sat at her bedside day and night, placing and replacing damp cloths upon the burning brow and coaxing the blistered lips to open to the nasty doses that the doctor said she should take.

After a time the fever passed away. The roses were absent from the cheeks—no longer chubby; the golden hair had lost its color, and most of it had fallen out——

And the right arm and leg of the little invalid hung limp and useless.

"Paralysis," said the doctor. "She may never get well. It is likely to spread, and affect other parts of her body. Maybe that will not happen now, but later on, I am afraid, it will."

That was fifty-two years ago. The little invalid is still an invalid. The kittens and the puppies grew, became old, and died; staring, blue-eyed dolly became covered with dust, and then with mold, and rotted away. The great rustling trees and the soft waving grass disappeared, and in their places came farms and then houses; and then many more houses, and streets and glaring white sidewalks and other things that accompany the city in its encroachment upon the great country that Nature made.

And what of the little invalid?

She lived.

Her body grew, but its growth was out of the symmetrical tininess of the child into the pitiful shapelessness of the weakling dwarf.

Her mind remained as it was—that of a prattling tot of 6.

The years whitened the thin hair, and darkened and wrinkled the poor face; they dimmed the blue eyes and framed them with faint white brows and deep crows' feet—but left in them the look of the little child; they widened the breadth of the shoulders—but bent them over until the chest was sunken and weak; they lengthened the arms and legs—but palsied the poor muscles that control them.

The years left the mind as it was on the day when 6-year-old Clay Jeter obeyed its careless promptings and took her kittens and her puppies and dolly for that last excursion into the woods.

The little old gray-haired child lives with her sister, who is the wife of Charles H. Becker, a salesman for a large wholesale dry goods firm. Her room is the back one on the second floor of the pretty home of the Beckers in Wellston—on Garfield avenue, two blocks west of the Suburban tracks. A window looks out upon a wide yard, where the grass is soft and green, and where a few tall forest trees rustle softly in summer and sigh sadly in winter. Under one of these is a swing, at which the poor little woman-child looks wistfully, but which she may never enjoy; close beside it is the kennel of a fox terrier, who barks and tugs at his unyielding chain and seems to be calling to her to come out and romp as she used to do with her own tiny dog years and years ago. But she can never obey the call. Sometimes she can walk partly across the room; all the rest of the time—except when she is lying in her bed—she must sit in the easy chair that is pulled up close to the window, and look out through the glass panes or the wire screen.

Now and then cruel pains rack her poor head; but for most of the time she does not suffer. Six months ago she had a second paralytic stroke, and for many weeks it was thought she could never again leave her bed. The paralysis spread to one side of her throat, and she had to be fed through a silver tube. But doctors know better how to handle such cases than they did half a century ago, and the spread of the trouble was checked and finally turned back, so that now she is no worse than she has been for all these years.

Two years ago Clay Jeter's mother died. Before that—many years before—her father had died. But the woman-child does not know what death is.

"Where is mamma?" she asked her sister for many days.

And then she forgot—except that she often asks if she did not once have a mamma, as other little girls have.

Sometimes the children tease her. It seems so odd to have a gray-haired playmate who is no older than themselves. She may laugh at them, not understanding their taunts; or she may fly into a tantrum—for all the world as she did in those far-away days when she had golden hair and chubby cheeks. Then, she will scream and stamp her foot; and, if very angry, may seek to scratch and pull hair. But she can never reach her momentary enemy. She may arise from her chair; but her limbs, refusing to bear even so slight a burden, drop her to the floor, where she can only cry out in her rage and beat her trembling hands against the senseless carpet.

She knows the letters and the childish prayers taught her at her mother's knee, but no others. And, as she asked in those days, she now asks, "Who is God?" Her dim eyes brighten at the sight of gaily-colored pictures; she claps her hands when she hears music; she still dreams and talks of fairies and hobgoblins.

She faintly remembers that she did not always live where her home now is. Ten years ago Mr. Becker took her and her mother to live with him and his wife at Wellston, and the woman-child remembers a ride in a big buggy with sides to it, and some of the things she saw on the journey. And at such times she asks if she is ever going back.

There was, long, long ago, a hope that the little invalid might get well. It was not a hope born of reason—it was the simple hope of devoted parents. For six years physicians were called, but all spoke as did the old doctor who had first rendered his hopeless verdict—"She will never get well." Before the father died his hope had fled. The mother nourished hers for a longer time; but after years and years she, too, saw the fruitlessness of it all. Now no one hopes. The little old gray-haired child will continue as she is until hampered nature gives up the battle and life leaves the poor withered form.

The little old child never hoped. What is there, to her, in hope or despair, in life or death? They are only words whose meaning she does not understand. So long as she has her doll and other children to play with, and the green grass and the rustling trees to look out upon, there is nothing else to desire. She has never seen the wonders of the world, and does not know they exist. She has never ridden on a street car, and, save for the yellow flyers of the Suburban line that rattle along their iron path two blocks away, she does not know that they are a part of human life. For her, there is no building taller than the white house with its ugly red observatory across the way. There are no paved streets, and electric lights, and railroad trains and steamboats; there are no churches and theaters—no scenes of revelry and no places of gloom—no love and hate—no passion and strife—no pursuit of gold and wisdom. Yesterday is forgotten; to-day is bright or gray; to-morrow is—nothing. To her there is naught in all this world except the four walls of her room—the grass and the trees and the houses that she can see from her window—the black and white spotted dog that tugs at his chain and barks to her from the door of his kennel—the children that play with her—and the doll upon which she lavishes all her love and care.